Escalante River Bridge
Spanning the Escalante River on State Route 12
9.5 miles east of Escalante
Garfield County
Utah

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
ESCALANTE RIVER BRIDGE

I. INTRODUCTION

Location:	Spanning the Escalante River on SR-12, 9.5 miles east of Escalante, Garfield County, Utah.
Quadrangle:	Calf Creek, Utah 7.5' (1964; P.I. 1976)
UTM:	12/463180mE/4180460mN
Date of Construction:	1940
Present Owner:	State of Utah
Present Use:	One lane vehicular bridge; to be replaced by a newer structure in 1994.
Significance:	The Escalante River Bridge, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1940 under the supervision of Albert DeLong, Jr. and Daniel N. Covington, represents a unique multiple span concrete slab bridge. It is the only known bridge in Utah which was built to allow floodwaters to flow over its deck and is the last one-lane bridge still extant on the Utah State Highway system. The completion of the bridge and road provided the first all-weather road connecting the town of Boulder to other parts of Utah and ended one of the last pack mule postal services in the United States.
Historian:	Michael R. Polk, Sagebrush Archaeological Consultants, Ogden, Utah. March 1994.
Photographer:	Michael R. Polk, Sagebrush Archaeological Consultants, Ogden, Utah. February 1994.

II. HISTORY

A. Need For Bridge

South-central Utah was one of the more remote parts of the territory during the mid 1800s when the region was first settled by European-Americans. As a consequence, settlement of the area occurred late as compared to the rest of the territory. The first major occupation of present-day Utah took place when Mormon immigrants settled in the area of the future site of Salt Lake City in 1847. The southern part of Utah was settled over the following 30 to 40 years. This was due, in part, to its distance from the Salt Lake City area, but also because of its rugged and inhospitable nature. Much of the area is dissected by deep canyons, and high mountains and plateaus which discouraged both early settlement and the development of transportation routes through the area.

Most of south-central Utah was bypassed during the first wave of Mormon Church colonization in the southern part of the state during the 1850s. Colonies were not founded further east until the 1860s. Salina and Monroe, both founded in 1863, and Panguitch, founded in 1864, were the first outlying settlements in south-central Utah to be located outside of the "Mormon Corridor" (a corridor of land from Salt Lake City to the Pacific Ocean in southern California along which colonies were planted).[1] Settlement of areas even further east were slow to develop, due to the difficult terrain, poor transportation routes and less desirable agricultural lands. As a result, it was not until 1875, during the colonization efforts of the 1870s, that Escalante was founded, a settlement in the heart of this region.

Escalante began and has remained an agricultural community, emphasizing livestock raising. After initial settlement, the population of the town grew rapidly to 623 in 1880. After this time, the population increased slowly from 667 in 1890, 723 in 1900, 846 in 1910 to 1,032 in 1920.[2] During this period, the community remained quite isolated because the only road connecting Escalante to the outside world crossed a 9,200 foot high pass, making winter travel very difficult.[3] This road was reconstructed by the Forest Service in 1915. During this time there were no roads beyond Escalante to the north, south or east, only trails. Interestingly, a settlement did exist beyond Escalante. The town of Boulder, located about 30 miles northeast of Escalante at an elevation of 6676 feet, was initially settled in 1889 as a ranching community.[4] From its initial settlement until the middle 1930s good roads did not exist to connect the town with the outside world. Two trails connected Boulder to other communities, including one which extended north over Boulder Mountain to Grover, and the other south to the Escalante River and on to Escalante. Neither trail was a good route, though most wagon traffic traversed the northern route because of its less steep terrain.[5] In 1906 the U.S. Mail began delivery, twice a week, to this community via pack horse or mule over the trail from Escalante.[6]

Early in this century Escalante endeavored to improve the level of transportation to its isolated setting, but Boulder (which was even more isolated) struggled to gain even a seasonal road for wagon travel. Efforts toward this goal, attempted by Boulder residents, were locally funded and largely carried out by Garfield County road crews. These efforts consisted of limited work done on the road from Escalante in 1906, 1915, and 1924.[7] It was not until the Depression era, however, that the first adequate vehicular road was built to Boulder.

The onset of the Depression created economic hardships throughout the nation, none greater, however, than in the Intermountain area.[8] As the economic difficulties deepened into the early 1930s, unemployment and poverty reached such proportions that the federal government created the Works Progress Administration, Public Works Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). These agencies were created in an attempt to both alleviate the unemployment problem and to improve the country's public works infrastructure. The latter goal was a critical element prompting the construction of roads to Boulder and surrounding areas.

In 1933, two CCC camps were established at Escalante in Garfield County and in Grover, in adjacent Wayne County.[9] Temporary satellite "spike camps" were placed near various project locations. All of the CCC work in the area was done under the direction of the Powell National Forest (now Dixie National Forest). Though of great benefit to the residents of Boulder, construction of a road to the community by the Forest Service was probably as much to provide access to ranger stations and parts of the National Forest as to make the town more accessible. Under the direction of Forest Service employees, two roads were completed to the town of Boulder between 1933 and 1935. The first road connecting Boulder with Escalante, known as "Hell's Backbone Road" or the upper road, became usable in the fall of 1933 and was completed in 1935.[10] Completion of this road provided Boulder with its first road connection to the outside world. In 1935 another road, known as the East End Road, was completed by the CCC workers. This road connected Boulder and Grover.[11]

Despite the completion of the two roads, vehicular travel on the roads was still impossible during the winter months. A year-round road remained the desire of Boulder residents. To alleviate this problem, the Forest Service and CCC agreed to construct a year-round "lower road" from Escalante to Boulder. Work began on this project in the mid 1930s. This construction project was described by Baldridge:[12]

> In 1935 an all-year road was started which followed the approximate route taken by the pack trains [from Escalante]. This route traveled east of Escalante to Calf Creek, climbed out of the canyon to the rim, and then swung north along the sharp ridge of volcanic rock. Here lay a situation similar to Hell's Backbone where it became necessary to blast the top of the narrow ridge in order to secure enough space to build the road. The route continued over the New Home Bench and on into Boulder. By 1938 only five miles of this "million-dollar road to Boulder" remained to be completed, five miles that had to be blasted through solid rock. Supervisor A.C. Folster of the Powell National Forest announced that 3,000 bags of cement and two tons of steel were needed to build two more bridges. He explained that the Forest Service or CCC funds were not available since that portion of the road lay outside the National Forest.
>
> In spite of protests by the Associated Civic Clubs of Southern Utah the Escalante camp transferred in the spring of 1939 and work on the road came to a halt. In September, however, Senator Elbert Thomas announced that Escalante would be one of the eight Forest Service [CCC] camps operating during the winter and work shortly commenced.

By mid April 1940 only one-half mile of the solid sandstone remained to be removed and Regional Forester C.N. Woods stated that by early summer completion of the road would make it "...possible to reach Boulder, Utah...[by road] any time in the year for the first time in history".[13]

Lenora Hall LeFevre provides further details on the road construction:[14]

> [Completion of the road]...included blasting through the sandstone ledges to the [Escalante] river and along the sheer canyon walls east of Calf Creek, where the men built a one-room rock house for an office. Upstream on a bend of the Escalante River they rocked up Phips' grave. Another spike camp was established on John King's property in the meadow south of their home. The spike camp at the Boulder ranger station had already been in use by the C.C.C. crew who worked the East End road around the Boulder mountain.

As the road construction neared completion, the two bridges noted by Baldridge were all that remained to complete the road project.[15] One of these bridges was to span the Escalante River and a smaller one was to span nearby Calf Creek.

B. Bridge Construction History

By the spring of 1940, the costs of road construction had depleted the funds of the CCC and the Forest Service. Also, the Forest Service believed it was not their responsibility to fund the construction of expensive bridges on the Escalante River and Calf Creek which lay outside of National Forest lands.[16] Through the urgings of the Associated Civic Clubs of Southern Utah, local Forest officials, citizens and civic organizations, an agreement was reached between the Powell National Forest, Division of Grazing (Grazing Service) and Garfield County to jointly bear the costs of construction and, thus, complete the road.[17] The cost of construction materials for both of these bridges was $5,250. The largest part of that sum was used in construction of the much larger Escalante River Bridge.[18]

Construction on the Escalante River Bridge (and presumably the smaller Calf Creek Bridge as well) appears to have begun in March 1940 while the road was still under construction.[19] It was completed in mid June with the official opening of the bridge and road taking place on June 21, 1940.[20] The bridge construction was supervised by Albert DeLong and Dan Covington.[21] Labor for construction of the bridge came from two camps. Near the end of construction of the lower road in March 1940, CCC members of the Boulder Ranger Station Spike Camp were moved to the Calf Creek and Escalante CCC Camps to be nearer the work.[22] Completion of this bridge and the road ended the need for wintertime pack mule mail service to Boulder from Escalante, thus ending one of the last of these services in the United States.

In honor of the completion of the final link in the year-round road from Escalante to Boulder, residents of Escalante and Boulder sponsored a celebration on June 27, 1940.[23] This celebration included a tour of the road and bridge and a barbecue and rodeo at Boulder.[24]

II. THE BRIDGE

A. Description

The fifty-four year old bridge on State Route 12 is oriented west-northwest by east-southeast spanning the course of the southeastward flowing Escalante River channel. The Escalante River Bridge consists of a 14 pier, 15 span, steel reinforced, poured concrete slab structure, measuring 240 feet long with a 14 foot wide running surface. It has six-inch wide segmented raised concrete curbs on either side of the deck. The bridge supports consist of rectangular concrete piers with rounded ends. The piers are spaced every 16 feet and are oriented perpendicular to the flow of the river channel. As a result, the piers are set at a slight diagonal to the running surface of the deck. The piers are finished in a dome shape up to the sides of the bridge deck. Because of excessive siltation which has occurred in the vicinity of the bridge since construction, only nine of the 14 piers are presently visible and only four of those serve the purpose of allowing water to pass beneath the bridge. Silt has covered 110 feet of the west end and 75 feet of the east end of the bridge.[25] The bridge structure, constructed with squat multiple piers anchored to the underlying sandstone and low segmented curbs, was designed to allow floodwaters to pass over the entire bridge without resulting in structural damage.

Two masonry abutment walls were constructed at each end of the bridge. They are made of shaped sandstone blocks mortared together with concrete. Except for a few visible portions of the wall on the south side of the east end of the bridge, all traces of these abutments have been buried by siltation. Historic photographs indicate that the wall at the east end of the bridge extended southward to a sandstone bedrock exposure. The abutment on the north end forms a retaining wall to hold up the road materials at the end of the bridge and keep high waters from eroding the road base. This structure has been completely buried beneath silt.

The bridge deck surface was originally concrete, but was paved with asphalt when the entire road was paved during the mid 1960s. There are five expansion joints built into the bridge, evenly spaced at about 50 foot intervals. These joints are set at a diagonal to the deck and are filled with pliable tar. The low concrete curbs are segmented, consisting of four-foot long curbs alternating with one-foot long openings to allow water to flow off the deck.

There have been two minor additions to the bridge since construction. A metal water depth gauge is attached to one of the concrete piers on the north side of the bridge. Old depth numbers are painted in white on the same pier. Also, there is a one-half inch conduit pipe attached to the north side of the bridge extending its entire length. This conduit carries the telephone wires connecting Escalante and Boulder.

Overall, the bridge is well constructed and represents a unique design for a concrete slab bridge. The superstructure is in good condition. The curb is in deteriorated condition in places where reinforcing steel is exposed. Much of the bridge has been buried by silt which precludes complete inspection of the structure.

B. Ownership and Future

The Escalante River Bridge was paid for by several governmental agencies including the Forest Service, Grazing Service, Garfield County and Civilian Conservation Corps (in the form of labor). It appears that ownership of the bridge was turned over to the Utah State Road Commission soon after construction was completed.[26] The bridge has remained a part of the state road system since that time. Traffic volume on the structure has dramatically increased over the years as has traffic speed.[27] As such, the bridge has become functionally obsolete and is now rated as a hazard due to its narrow and low profile. A two-lane replacement structure is scheduled to be built on the site in 1994 which will be high enough to allow Escalante River floodwaters to safely pass underneath rather than flow over the bridge.

IV. BRIDGE BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL

A. Engineering and Design

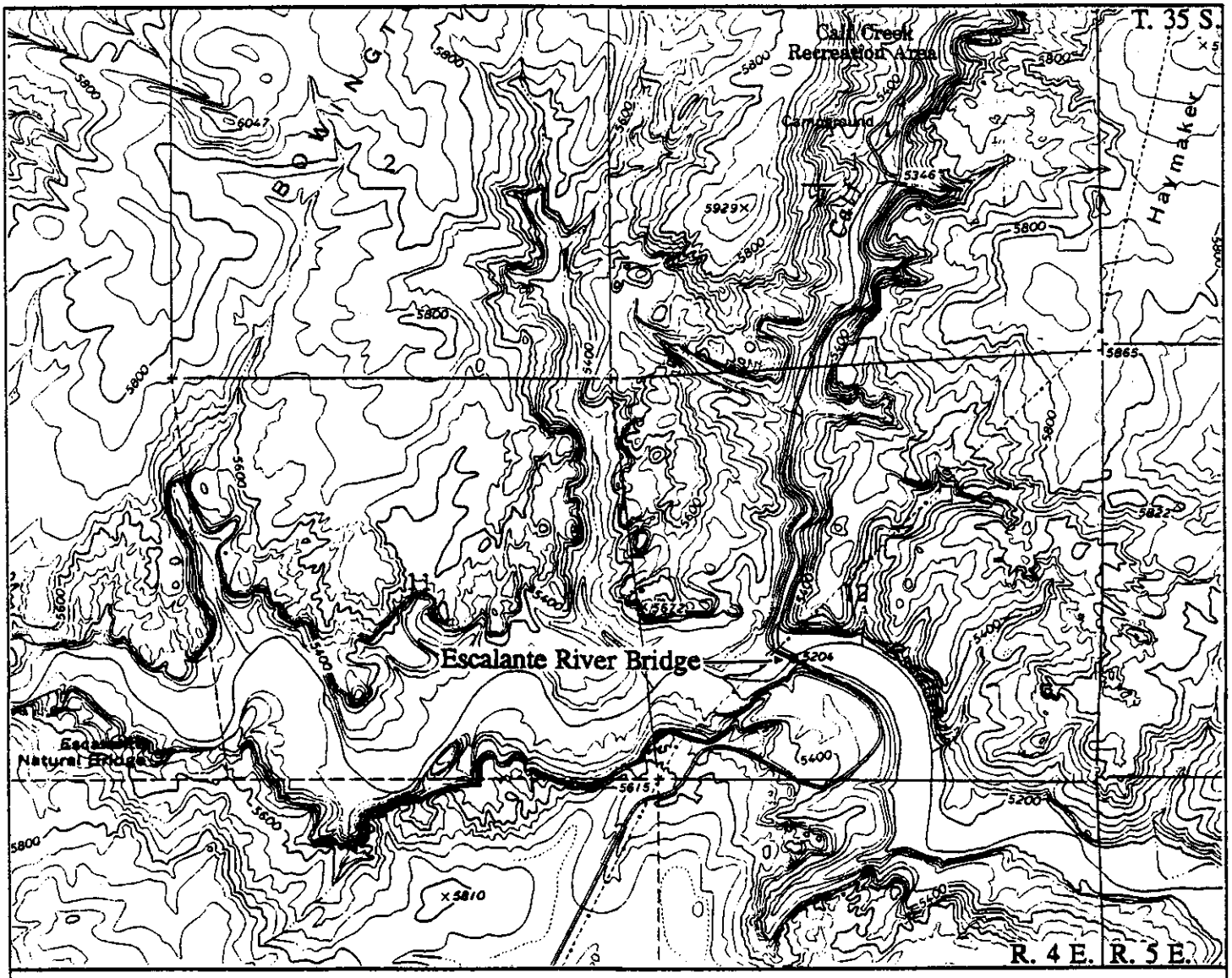
The engineering design for the Escalante Bridge is not known. It was built by the CCC under the direction of Forest Service personnel, but it is not known whether that agency designed the structure. No plans have been found for the bridge. The design of the structure is quite unique. It is a slab bridge with multiple spans, an unusual curb configuration and was built to allow flood waters to pass over its deck. Such a design suggests that it was locally engineered to match the particular environmental requirements of Escalante Canyon.

B. Bridge Builders

The Escalante River Bridge was built by CCC laborers under the direction of supervisors Albert DeLong and Dan Covington.[28] It appears that Albert DeLong was the Forest Service employee in charge and that Dan Covington was the CCC foreman. The project was carried out entirely under the direction of Powell National Forest.

Albert DeLong was one of the first forest rangers in Utah. He worked on the Powell National Forest in Panguitch, Utah from 1905 to 1919, primarily supervising grazing allotments and issuing permits.[29] He was born May 10, 1879 in Panguitch to Albert and Elizabeth Houston DeLong. On June 4, 1900 he married Mary Ellen Pryor in Cedar City. His wife, Mary Ellen, died in 1950. After his official retirement from the Forest Service in 1919, DeLong locally farmed small amount of acreage and continued to work on various construction projects in the county. Some of these projects were done for the Forest Service. Apparently, he sometimes took his team of horses out when road construction projects were undertaken. According to Elizabeth Judd, daughter of Albert DeLong, he was working for the Forest Service on contract during the time of construction of the Escalante River Bridge. DeLong continued to live in Panguitch the remainder of his life. He died after an illness on September 14, 1961.

Daniel M. Covington was foreman of various CCC camps for seven years.[30] He was born May 7, 1888 in Orderville, Utah to John T. and Elizabeth Adams Covington. He married Leona Heath of Wayne County. It is known that Covington, as foreman, was one of the leaders who set up a CCC Spike Camp at Calf Creek in May 1937 as part of Company 4778 Camp F-42 out of Escalante.[31] This camp was the one which eventually built the Escalante River Bridge in 1940. In March 1939 Covington was teaching courses to CCC boys in Masonry, possibly a clue to his expertise in the bridge construction.[32] After completion of work on the Escalante River Bridge in June 1940 Covington moved on to other CCC projects. In July he was stationed at the Big Cottonwood CCC Camp in Salt Lake County, Utah. While working on a Forest Service road project in Alta on July 14, 1940, Covington died of a heart attack.



SCALE 1:24 000

1 MILES 0 1

1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 8000 9000 10 000 FEET

1 KILOMETERS 0 1 2

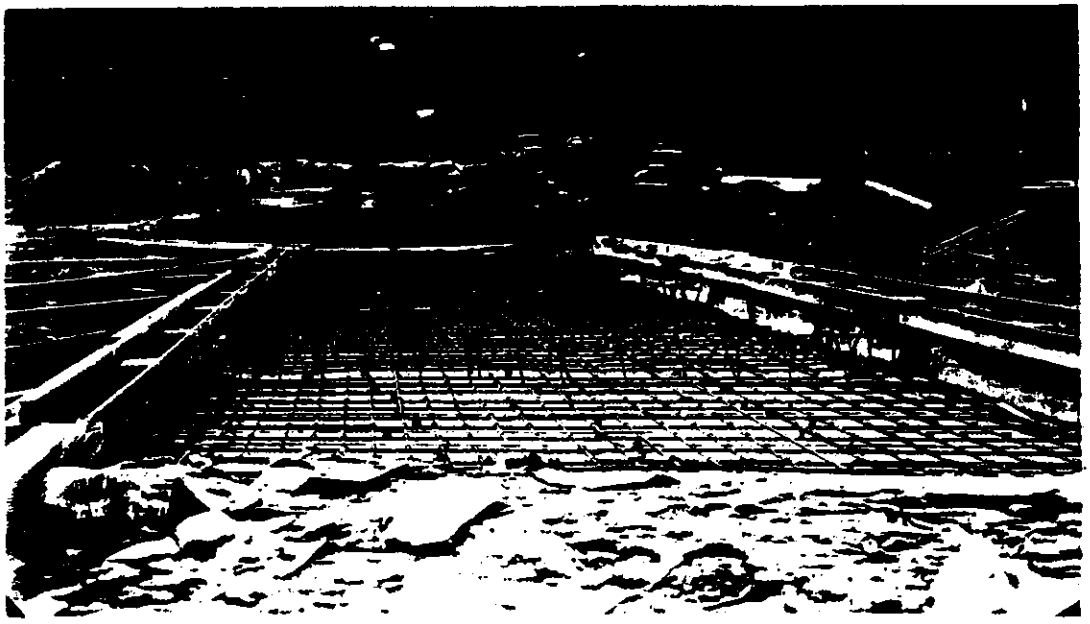
1000 0 METERS 1000 2000

CONTOUR INTERVAL 40 FEET

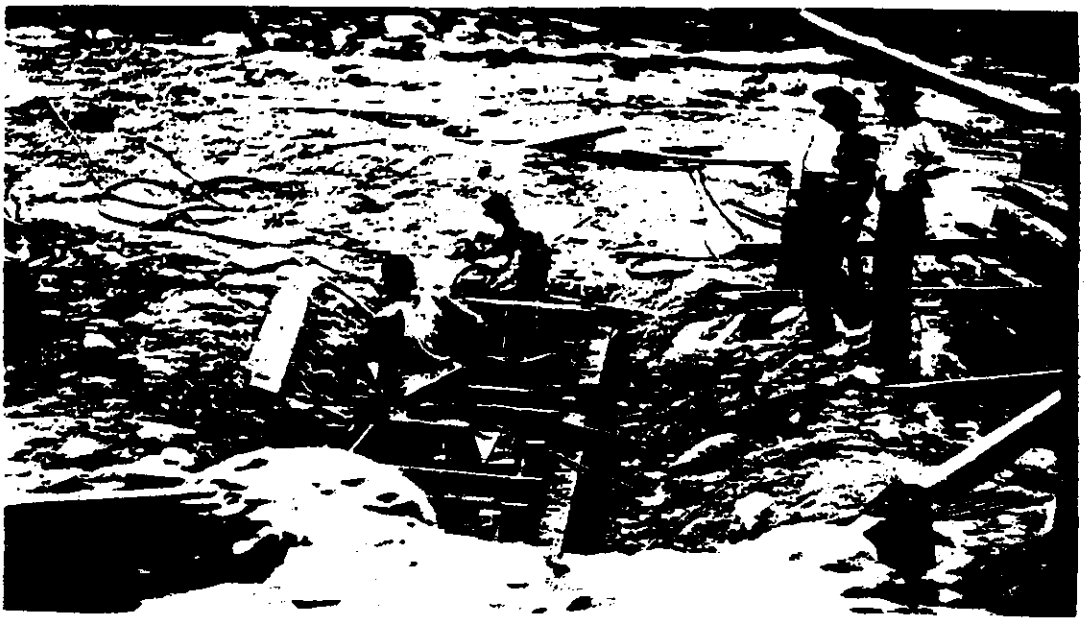
SUPPLEMENTAL CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET

N true North

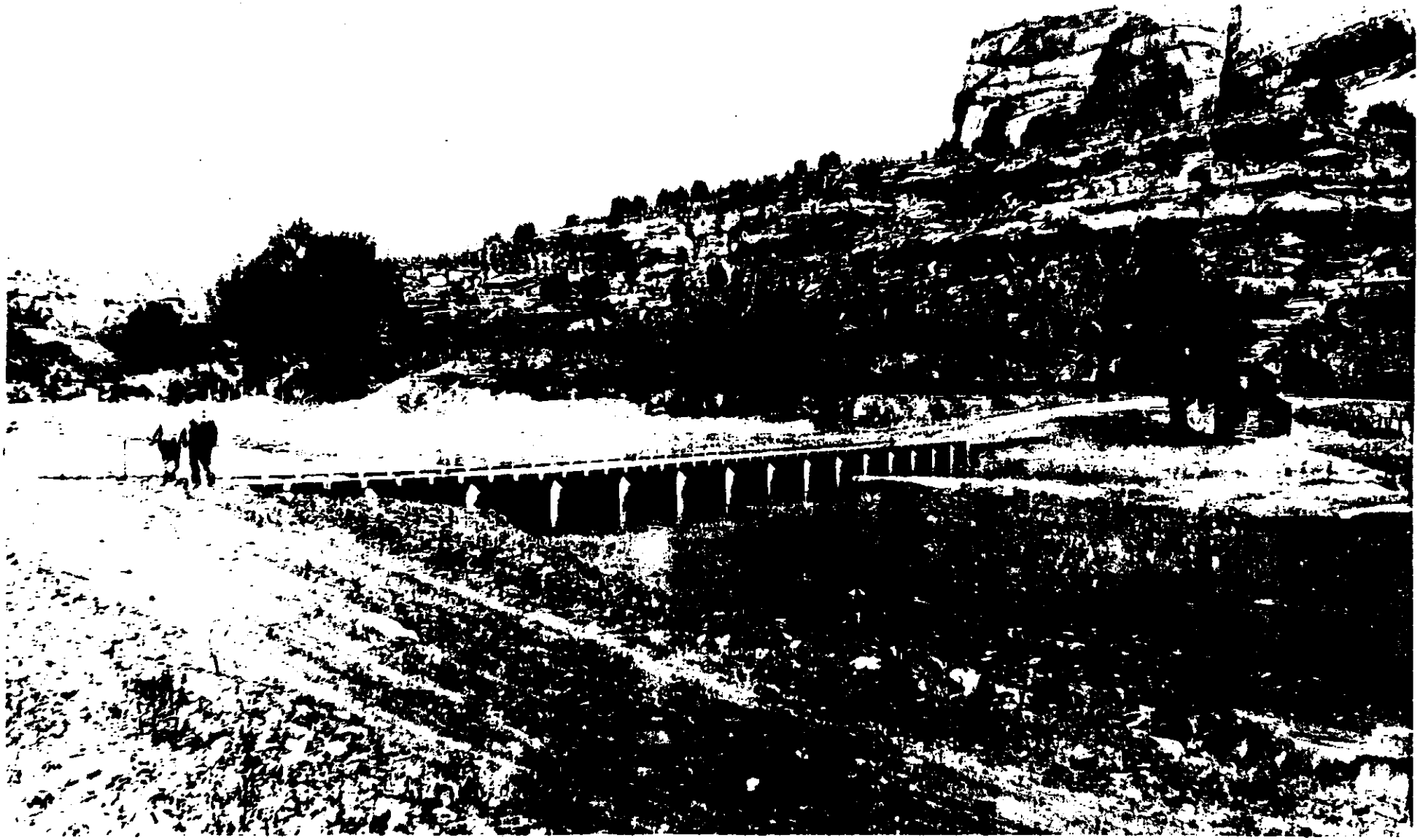
Location of Escalante River Bridge spanning the Escalante River 9.5 miles east of Escalante, Garfield County, Utah. Taken from: USGS 7.5' Quadrangle Calf Creek, Utah (1964; P.I. 1976).



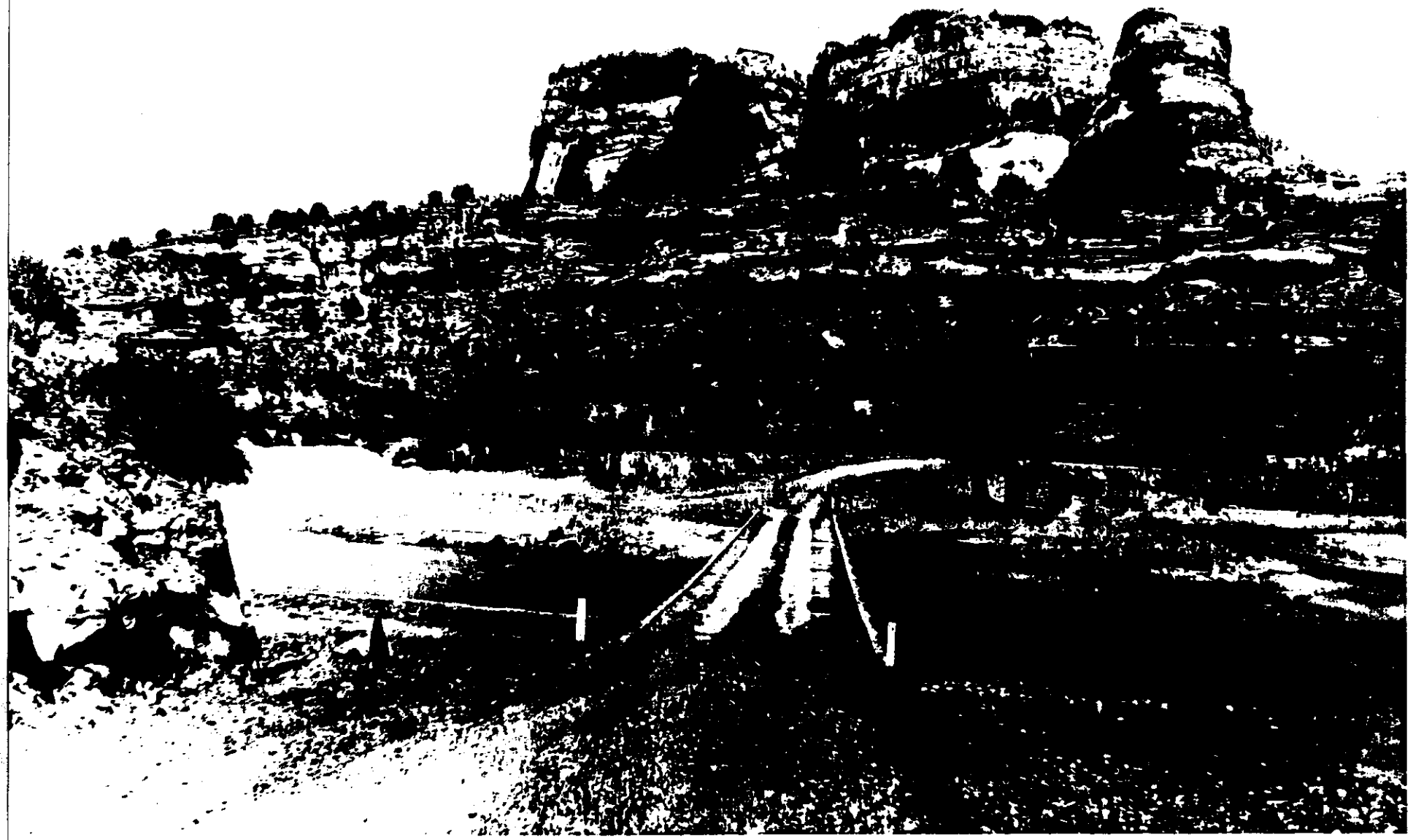
Photocopy of a historic photograph of Escalante River Bridge under construction in spring 1940. The view is to the northwest. Original photograph is located in Historical files, Supervisor's office, Dixie National Forest, Cedar City, Utah.



Photocopy of a historic photograph of Escalante River Bridge piers under construction in spring 1940. The view is to the southwest. Original photograph is located in Historical files, Supervisor's office, Dixie National Forest, Cedar City, Utah.



Photocopy of a historic photograph of Escalante River Bridge. The view is to the southwest. Photograph was taken shortly after construction, ca. early 1940s. Original photograph located at Utah Department of Transportation, District Three Office, Richfield, Utah.



Photocopy of a historic photograph of Escalante River Bridge. The view is to the northwest. Photograph was taken shortly after construction, ca. early 1940s. Original photograph is located at Utah Department of Transportation, District Three Office, Richfield, Utah.

V. ENDNOTES

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4. Daughters of Utah Pioneers, Garfield County Company, *Golden Nuggets of Pioneer Days: A History of Garfield County,* Daughters of Utah Pioneers, Panguitch, Utah, 1949, p. 145.

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7. LeFevre, Lenora Hall, *The Boulder Country and Its People; A History of the People of Boulder and the Surrounding Country, One Hundred Years, 1972-1973,* Art City Publishing Company, Springville, Utah, 1973, pp. 227-228.

8. Alexander, Thomas G., *The Rise of Multiple-Use Management in the Intermountain West: A History of Region 4 of the Forest Service,* U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1987, p. 101.

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10. Woolsey, Nethella Griffen, *The Escalante Story: A History of the Town of Escalante, and Description of the Surrounding Territory, Garfield County, Utah,* p. 193.

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12. Baldridge, Kenneth W., *Nine Years of Achievement: The Civilian Conservation Camps in Utah,* Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of History, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 1971, pp. 200-201.

13. *Ogden Standard Examiner,* "CCC Youths Get Roads in Shape", 11 April 1940, p. 8, col. 1.

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18. *Garfield County News*, 27 June 1940.

19. King, Irene, "Lower Boulder Road is Passable", *Garfield County News*, 21 March 1940, p. 1, col. 4.

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29. *Garfield County News*, "Services for Albert DeLong", 21 September 1961, p. 1, col. 1; Judd, Mrs. Elizabeth, [Telephone conversation between Michael R. Polk of Sagebrush and Mrs. Elizabeth Judd, daughter of Albert DeLong concerning his life and work for the U.S. Forest Service], March 15, 1994.

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32. Sagebrush Saga, March 1939, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 9. [CCC newsletter of Company 4429, Camp F-42, Escalante, Utah.]

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